

Message Text

SECRET

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TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 2462
GUEHEG/AMEMBASSY CAIRO PRIORITY 0751
AMCONSUL JERUSALEM PRIORITY
WHITE HOUSE PRIORITY

S E C R E T SECTION 1 OF 2 TEL AVIV 4739

EXDIS DIST AS NODIS

FOR ATHERTON AND SAUNDERS FROM LEWIS

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PEPR, XF, IS, US, EG
SUBJECT: RESPONDING TO ISRAELI PUBLIC INFORMATION CAMPAIGN

REF: A) STATE 081926, B) CAIRO 09825

1. THIS IS A TRICKY PROBLEM. THE ISRAELIS NOW REALIZE THAT WE ARE ON THE VERGE OF "GOING FOR BROKE," ARE SEEING THE DAMAGING EFFECTS OF OUR PUBLIC INFORMATION EFFORTS ON THIER STANDING WITH THE AMERICAN PUBLIC, AND ARE INCREASINGLY BITTER ABOUT WHAT THEY BELIEVE TO BE "HIGHLY UNFAIR AND UNWISE U.S. TACTICS." EMANATING FROM THE HIGHEST LEVELS OF THE U.S. GOVERNMENT. THEIR PRE-DICTABLE RESPONSE WILL BE THE KNEE TO THE GROIN.

2. FROM BEGIN DOWN, NEARLY ALL THE ISRAELI LEADERS BELIEVE PRESIDENT CARTER TREATED BEGIN IN A DELIBERATELY PROVOCATIVE, UNJUST FASHION AT THE END OF HIS WASHINGTON VISIT BY CHARACTERIZING BEGIN'S POSITIONS AS TOTALLY NEGATIVE AT THE SENATE AND HOUSE COMMITTEE BRIEFINGS.

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EVERY NEGATIVE WORD SUBSEQUENTLY APPEARING IN THE U.S. PRESS AND IN THE REPORTS FROM ISRAELI CORRESPONDENTS IN WASHINGTON IS SEEN HERE AS THE RESULT OF A DELIBERATE OFFICIAL CAMPAIGN "TO BLACKEN BEGIN AND CUT HIM DOWN TO SIZE." EVEN THOSE MANY LIKE YADIN WHO DISAGREE WITH BEGIN ABOUT SETTLEMENTS OR 242 RESENT IT DEEPLY. AS AN ILLUSTRATION OF THE DEGREE TO PARANOIA, EVEN ROY ATHERTON'S

CAREFULLY CRAFTED AND BALANCED SPEECH IN ATLANTA ON U.S. MIDDLE EAST POLICY AROUSED SCREAMS OF "FOUL" HERE FROM PEOPLE WHO SHOULD KNOW BETTER. IN OTHER WORDS, CONTRARY TO HERMANN EILTS' PERCEPTION (REF B, PARA ONE), THE ISRAELIS SEE US AS HAVING ALREADY "GONE PUBLIC" -- WITH A VENGEANCE.

3. IN THIS ATMOSPHERE, IT IS HARDLY SURPRISING THAT THE GOI IS GIVING GREATER EMPHASIS TO ITS INFORMATION EFFORTS HERE AND IN THE U.S. ISRAELI GOVERNMENT SOURCES, MOSTLY WE BELIEVE IN THE FOREIGN MINISTRY, HAVE BEEN RESPONSIBLE FOR SOME OF THE RECENT PRESS STORIES WHICH DAILY DISTORT USG POSITIONS. WE SEE THESE EFFORTS AS LARGELY DEFENSIVE AND NOT VERY WELL ORCHESTRATED. ONE OF THE CHARACTERISTICS OF PUBLIC AND PRESS OPINION HERE WHICH COMES TO THE FORE AT SUCH MOMENTS OF U.S.-ISRAELI TENSION IS A HIGH DEGREE OF IRRATIONALITY ON SECURITY ISSUES. AS EXTERNAL PRESSURE OR CRITICISM CONVERGES ON ISRAEL, AN IRRATIONAL REACTION SETS IN WHICH DISCOURAGES CAREFUL ANALYSIS OR DEBATE. THE TYPICAL REACTION HERE HAS BEEN THE RECURRING CALL FOR ESTABLISHMENT OF A MINISTRY OF INFORMATION OR AT LEAST FOR EXPANDED OVERSEAS INFORMATION PROGRAMS. AND THE GOI HAS ANNOUNCED THAT MFA DEPUTY SPOKESMAN BENNY AVILEAH HAS BEEN ASSIGNED TO NEW YORK TO COORDINATE ISRAELI INFORMATION EFFORTS.

4. IT MIGHT BE USEFUL TO CITE SOME OF THE STATEMENTS
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OR ALLEGATIONS WHICH HAVE APPEARED--WHATEVER THE SOURCE --IN RECENT ISRAELI MEDIA REPORTS AND COMMENTARIES. SOME OF THESE HAVE ALREADY BEEN REBUTTED, BUT THEY ARE ILLUSTRATIVE OF THE THINGS WHICH, IN VARIOUS WAYS, WE AND WASHINGTON SHOULD CONTINUE TO REFUTE (HOW WE SHOULD REFUTE THEM WILL BE DISCUSSED LATER IN THIS MESSAGE):

- A. THAT THE U.S. HAS CHANGED (HARDENED) ITS POSITION ON THE BEGIN PEACE PLAN;
- B. THAT THE U.S. IS SIDING WITH EGYPT ON MIDDLE EAST PEACE DISCUSSIONS AND IS NO LONGER PLAYING THE ROLE OF OBJECTIVE MEDIATOR;
- C. THAT THE CARTER ADMINISTRATION CONTAINS NO INFLUENTIAL VOICE REALLY SYMPATHETIC TO ISRAELI PROBLEMS AND CONCERNS;
- D. THAT THE ADMINISTRATION INSISTS THAT ISRAEL MUST GIVE UP ALL THE OCCUPIED TERRITORY, EXCEPT PERHAPS FOR "MINISCULE MODIFICATIONS" (MARCH 31 MAARIV);
- E. THAT THE U.S. REALLY FAVORS A PALESTINIAN STATE ("HOMELAND" AND "STATE" ARE SOMETIMES USED INTERCHANGABLY);
- F. THAT THE U.S. ALSO DISAGREES WITH THE ARAB INTERPRETATION OF RESOLUTION 242--I.E., TOTAL WITHDRAWAL; BUT DOES NOTHING TO MAKE THAT DIFFERENCE CLEAR IN PUBLIC.
- G. THAT THE U.S. WANTS ALL EXISTING SETTLEMENTS REMOVED,

AS WELL AS NO NEW ONES ESTABLISHED;

H. THAT THE U.S. HAS BROKEN ITS COMMITMENTS TO ISRAEL
ON MILITARY ASSISTANCE (OFFERING ONLY HALF THE F-15S
REQUESTED AND PLACING NEW AIRCRAFT FOR ISRAEL INTO A
PACKAGE WITH PLANES FOR EGYPT AND SAUDIA ARABIA);

I. THAT PRIME MINISTER BEGIN'S TREATMENT IN WASHINGTON
WAS "DEGRADING" (MARCUS IN HAARETZ, MARCH 31); AND

J. THAT THE U.S. IS "PRESSURING" ISRAEL.

5. ISRAEL-BASED RESPONSE: TRUST IT IS UNNECESSARY
TO SAY THAT I AND ALL OF OUR STAFF MEET SUCH MISSTATE-
MENTS HEAD-ON IN THE MANY PRIVATE DISCUSSIONS WE HOLD
WITH ISRAELI LEADERS AND JOURNALISTS. OCCASIONALLY WE
HAVE SOME IMPACT. WE ARE TRYING, HOWEVER, TO AVOID
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BECOMING PUBLIC ANTAGONISTS TO THE GOVERNMENT FOR REASONS
TOO OBVIOUS TO SPELL OUT. WITH THAT CAVEAT, WE WILL
CONTINUE TO ATTEMPT TO KEEP THE RECORD AS STRAIGHT AS
POSSIBLE AND TO SEE THAT U.S. STATEMENTS AND VIEWS ARE
UNDERSTOOD BY OFFICIALS AND PRESS ALIKE, THROUGH OUR
FREQUENT CONTACTS WITH BOTH. AS IT HAPPENED, I WAS

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TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 2463

INFO AMEMBASSY CAIRO PRIORITY

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WHITE HOUSE WASHDC PRIORITY

S E C R E T SECTION 2 OF 2 TEL AVIV 4739

EXDIS DIST AS NODIS

FOR ATHERTON AND SAUNDERS FROM LEWIS

BRIEFING THE AMERICAN PRESS HERE ABOUT THE SAME TIME ROY ATHERTON WAS GIVING HIS BACKGROUNDER FOR ISRAELI CORRESPONDENTS MARCH 30. WE WERE MAKING MANY OF THE SAME POINTS. THE EVENING BEFORE, I HAD BRIEFED THE ISRAELI PRESS, BOTH SESSIONS ON "DEEP BACKGROUND," FOR NO ATTRIBUTION TO ANY SOURCE. MY DCM, PAO, INFORMATION OFFICER AND POLITICAL OFFICERS ARE ALSO IN TOUCH WITH THE PRESS FREQUENTLY, AND THE PAO OR IO CALLS INDIVIDUAL JOURNALISTS TO TRY TO CORRECT THE RECORD IF THIS APPEARS TO BE DESIRABLE. NEEDLESS TO SAY, WE MAKE SURE THAT ALL KEY OFFICIAL TEXTS ARE IN THE HANDS OF JOURNALISTS AND OFFICIALS AS SOON AS POSSIBLE.

6. WASHINGTON- BASED RESPONSE: WHILE THE LEVEL AND VARIETY OF USG EFFORTS SHOULD PROBABLY REMAIN ABOUT THE SAME, BOTH IN ISRAEL AND IN WASHINGTON, YOU SHOULD KEEP IN MIND THAT REPORTS FROM WASHINGTON-BASED ISRAELI MEDIA CORRESPONDENTS ARE OFTEN CONSIDERED MORE AUTHORITY THAN THE WRITINGS OF THEIR COLLEAGUES HERE. THUS THE MOST EFFECTIVE PLACE TO COUNTER OR PREVENT DISTORTION

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OF U.S. POLICY POSITIONS TOWARDS ISRAEL AND THE MIDDLE EAST WILL OFTEN BE WASHINGTON RATHER THAN TEL AVIV OR JERUSALEM. FREQUENT CONTACT WITH ISRAELI MEDIA REPRESENTATIVES IN THE U.S. WILL CERTAINLY NOT CAUSE DISTORTIONS TO DISAPPEAR WHERE SUCH EMOTIONAL ISSUES ARE INVOLVED, BUT THE DAMAGE CAN PROBABLY BE SOMEWHAT REDUCED.

7. WE ARE FULL OF ADMIRATION FOR THE PATIENT EFFORTS OF HODDING CARTER AND HIS STAFF, AND OF NEA, TO BE AS RESPONSIVE AS POSSIBLE TO THE ISRAELI PRESS IN WASHINGTON. THE MARCH 31 SPECIAL BACKGROUNDER BY ROY ATHERTON WAS HIGHLY USEFUL AND QUITE ACCURATELY REPORTED HERE. IT COULD BE DONE FAIRLY REGULARLY, THOUGH OF COURSE, WE WANT TO AVOID, AS ROY NOTED, ANY IMPRESSION THAT WE ARE TRYING TO INTERFERE OR INFLUENCE INTERNAL POLITICAL EVENTS IN ISRAEL. WE WONDER IF THE SAME EFFORT IS MADE IN WASHINGTON THAT IS MADE HERE TO PROVIDE ISRAELI CORRESPONDENTS WITH OFFICIAL TEXTS RECEIVED HERE IN THE WIRELESS FILE, INCLUDING THE U.S. PRESS OPINION SUMMARY WHICH IS MUCH APPRECIATED BY LOCAL JOURNALISTS (WHETHER THEY AGREE WITH THE EDITORIALS OR NOT). EITHER STATE OR ICA SHOULD SEE THAT APPROPRIATE MATERIAL OF THIS SORT IS PROMPTLY GIVEN TO ISRAELI JOURNALISTS IN WASHINGTON. OUR RESPECTIVE EFFORTS COULD BE FURTHER ENHANCED BY EVEN CLOSER COMMUNICATION CONCERNING NOON BRIEFINGS AND OTHER RELEVANT PRESS EVENTS TAKING PLACE IN THE U.S. ON ESPECIALLY TROUBLESOME AND DELICATE

ISSUES, IT MIGHT BE HELPFUL IF NEA WOULD PHONE THE PAO
HERE FOR OUR SUGGESTIONS WHILE THE GUIDANCE FOR THE
NOON BRIEFING IS BEING PREPARED. WHEN A PARTICULAR NOON
BRIEFER HAS RUN INTO PROBLEMS WHICH COULD CAUSE NASTY
HEADLINES IN ISRAEL, WE WOULD LIKE TO BE ALERTED TO THE
DIFFICULTY AND TO DISCUSS HOW BEST TO HANDLE THE PROBLEM,
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IN WASHINGTON AND HERE. TWICE IN THE PAST SEVERAL WEEKS
PHONE CALLS FROM HERE HAVE LED TO USEFUL FURTHER CLARI-
FICATIONS BY THE DEPARTMENT, IMMEDIATELY FOLLOWING THE
NOON BRIEFING. IN BOTH INSTANCES, THE CLARIFICATION
WAS PICKED UP BY AT LEAST SOME OF THE ISRAELI PRESS.
FINALLY, WE NEED TO KNOW IN ADVANCE OF ANY SPECIAL BACK-
GROUND BRIEFINGS, SUCH AS ATHERTON'S, AND OF RELEVANT
PUBLIC STATEMENTS BY U.S. OFFICIALS, ESPECIALLY ON
SATURDAY AND SUNDAY WHEN THERE NORMALLY IS NO WIRELESS
FILE. TRANSCRIPTS, AT LEAST OF MIDDLE EAST PORTIONS,
SHOULD BE TRANSMITTED TO US BY THE FASTEST POSSIBLE MEANS,
NOT ONLY FOR DISTRIBUTION BUT SO THAT WE CAN BE PROPERLY
ARMED FOR MY FREQUENT MEETINGS WITH ISRAELI LEADERS
(OFTEN ON SATURDAY EVENINGS AND SUNDAYS).

8. A FINAL CAVEAT. WE ARE THE BIG POWER; THE ISRAELIS
FEEL THE STAKES ARE THEIR SURVIVAL, NOT OURS. WE NEED
TO LEAN OVER BACKWARDS NOT TO TAKE CHEAP SHOTS PUBLICLY
IF WE WANT TO EDGE THEM ALONG TOWARD THE FRIGHTENING
(FOR THEM) DECISIONS ONLY THEY CAN TAKE. THERE WILL BE
UNAVOIDABLE SHRILLNESS AND MISREPRESENTATION IN THE
PUBLIC ARENA HERE, AND NO CAMPAIGN "TO SET THE RECORD
STRAIGHT" WILL PREVENT IT. LET'S KEEP OUR COOL AND KEEP
OUR EYE ON THE OBJECTIVE--WHICH IS TO ASSURE THAT THE
ISRAELI RETAIN ENOUGH FAITH IN OUR SUPPORT FOR THEIR
SECURITY THAT THEY WILL TAKE WHAT TO MANY PEOPLE HERE
ARE NEARLY UNACCEPTABLE RISKS, EVEN FOR PEACE.
LEWIS

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